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## **Emergency Futures: Exception, Urgency, Interval, Hope**

Emergency as a descriptor, technique and legal-political device has become a taken-for-granted way of apprehending and governing events and situations. In this paper, I explore the temporality of emergency, through reflections on the use of declarations of emergency in relation to US-based Black Lives Matter protests. I do so in the context of claims and counter claims about contemporary transformations in what Reinhart Koselleck (2004: 241) terms the 'expected otherness of the future'. Arguing for changes in the form of the 'expected otherness of the future' rather than its simple loss, disappearance or absence, I describe how emergency operates around a temporality of exceptionality, urgency, and interval. Formal and informal declarations of emergency are, in addition, imbued with hope: the hope that time remains and action can make a difference to events. What the use of declarations of emergency by Black Lives Matter activists does is disrupt the geo-historically specific divide between the everyday and emergency by naming conditions that mix the endemic and the evental as emergencies. In the spark of hope that is the act of declaring that ongoing conditions should be treated as emergencies, the 'otherness of the future' folds into and becomes part of the present.

**Keywords:** Emergency, Futures, Black Lives Matter, Everyday, Declarations of Emergency

## **Emergency Futures: Exception, Urgency, Interval, Hope**

### **Introduction: 'In' an emergency**

Two activists take the stage and interrupt a netroots nation townhall meeting in Phoenix, Arizona. Part of a coalition of organisations concerned with racial justice ('Black Lives Matter', 'Dream Defenders', 'Black Alliance for Just Immigration'), the action draws attention to the slow and fast state violences that damage and destroy Black lives. On taking the stage, Patrisse Cullors – one of the co-founders of Black Lives Matter – spoke of death with urgency, indignation and rage:

'Let's be clear - every single day folks are dying, not, not being able to take another breath ... We are in a state of emergency. We are in a state of emergency. And if you don't feel that emergency, you are not human'.

In an interview some weeks later, Cullors talked about the action, including her declaration of emergency:

'When I went on stage and I said, 'this is a state of emergency' – I am not using that as hyperbole. Any other racial group whose symbols are being burned down and homes are being burned down; whose community members are being killed on a daily basis; who are completely dying of starvation, have the high unemployment rates and infant mortality rates - any other community

this would be seen as an opportunity to support and uplift and try and deal with the crisis. That's actually not what's happening in the Black community, so I think the iteration that we are in a state of emergency, and we want elected officials to treat it as such, is so important'<sup>i</sup>.

On the one year anniversary of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, U.S.A that is credited with sparking the Black Lives Matter protests and movement, a state of emergency is issued by St. Louis County<sup>ii</sup>. Issued by the county executive officer on the 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2015, the order legitimises a range of exceptional actions. They include that:

'The superintendent of the St. Louis County Police Department shall exercise all powers and duties necessary with respect to preservation of order, prevention of crimes and misdemeanours, apprehension and arrest, conserving the peace and other police and law enforcement functions.'

The declaration is legitimised by the county executive officer through reference to a near past of actual disorder and a potential future of harm:

'In light of last night's violence and unrest in the City of Ferguson, and the potential for harm to persons and property, I am exercising my authority as county executive to issue a state of emergency, effective immediately'.<sup>iii</sup>

What does it mean to live 'in' a state of emergency? In Patrisse Cullors' emergency statement, naming a state of emergency is to recognise and interrupt an already existing condition of existence that mixes the endemic and evental as enduring racist violence intensifies and is reproduced in scenes of police repression, and other forms and processes of state violence become ordinary. In the second emergency statement, St Louis County declare a temporary but in the present open-ended suspension of ordinary law that legitimises extraordinary powers and actions that long ago became ordinary as techniques of government. The declaration depends on and reproduces a fictitious line between emergency and a normality that has been in the past, and should be and can be returned to in the future. For those already living in emergency conditions, there is no such line. Emergency is the present and the past and, unless interrupted, will be the future. For Black lives, it is a condition of existence bound up with slow and fast deaths (Berlant 2011) and forms of endurance (Povinelli 2011). And, yet, there is hope in naming enduring conditions as an emergency: the hope for a future response that would bring to an end the unbearable present of systematic and evental harms. There is also a hope, though, in the state's declaration of a state of emergency: the hope for a future in which the disruption and energies of present protest named as 'violence and unrest' have been brought to order, ended, and a pre-emergency normality returned to - a pre-emergency normality that remains an emergency for Black lives.

In the early twenty-first century, the term 'emergency' is used in relation to multiple events or situations across different domains of life and across different functional sectors (Anderson 2016). Although a genealogy of the term remains to be

written, what is assumed to be common across the events or situations named as emergencies today is a particular *quality*. It is a quality of unpredictable, rapid change and the time of a turning point. Typically, an event or situation is named as an emergency if urgent, time-limited action is deemed necessary to forestall, stop or otherwise affect some kind of undesired future. Central to uses of the term emergency is, then, a sense that something valued (life, health, security) is at risk and, importantly, a sense that there is a limited time within which to curtail irreparable harm or damage to whatever it is that has been valued. Beginning with emergency in the Black Lives Matter movement reminds us that emergency has never only been a technique of the state, even if critical inquiry has, in the main, focused on intensifications of sovereign power in emergency situations (on which see Agamben 2005; Neal 2006; Adey, Anderson, Graham 2015). Progressive organisations orientated towards social justice frequently make strategic use of the term emergency to generate urgencies with the hope of translating un- or barely-bearable conditions into ethical or political scenes demanding response. Consider, for example, mobilisation of the idea/affect that we are 'in' a 'climate emergency' by climate change activists as a counter to the deferrel of action to an ever receding horizon (see, for example, Sutton and Spratt 2008). Or, for another example, consider movements for prison reform that name mass incarceration as a present emergency in a bid to interrupt the replacement of the welfare state by the penal state and its forms of violence (Gilmore 2006). Emergency is, then, one of a number of geo-historically specific 'modes of eventfulness' (Berlant 2011; Anderson 2016) that constitute the affective-ideational resources available to make sense of how existing

states of affairs fall apart as harms, damages and losses materialise. Co-existing with other modes such as disaster, apocalypse, collapse, shock, incident and crisis, emergency involves particular ways of relating past, present and future as well as specific assumptions about the occurrence, impact and end of events.

If emergency is a now ubiquitous resource for apprehending, diagnosing and living in the present, what distinguishes emergency from other modes of eventfulness? And what does understanding the temporality specific to emergency contribute to the current concern in sociology and elsewhere with futures? I pose these questions in the midst of contradictory, dissonant accounts of the future today and the novelty of transformations in relations between present and future. What various accounts share is a sense of a crisis in what Kosselleck (2004: 241) terms the 'expected otherness of the future' that underpinned historical temporality. The supposed crisis, and I will have cause to question these claims below, involves the absence, loss or disappearance of the future as unanticipatable novelty. Claims are made that the affective experience of the present combines a sense of repetition alongside the absence of a sense of the possibility of historical transformation. Being a crisis though, the otherness of the future is still held on to, even as it frays. Lauren Berlant (2011), for example, tracks how people just about hold on to fraying good life fantasies that partly depend on the continuation of ideas of progress. In the midst of the diagnosis of a loss of the idea and promise of the otherness of the future, what to make of the ubiquity of emergency and its particular ways of folding futures into the present? Or, to put the question differently, how has emergency become a means of relating to the presence or absence of the 'expected otherness of the future'?

The paper addresses this question in three parts. In section one, I summarise claims about transformations in the relation between present and future, in particular diagnoses of the loss or disappearance of the otherness of the future, and introduce the concept of 'styles' (Anderson 2010) of relating to the future. The following section argues that the emergency as a technique is organised around four temporalities - exceptionality, urgency, interval and hope. Section three then returns to the tension between the two ways of being 'in' emergency that I began with and argues that the emergency declarations can be acts of hope that produce a particular kind of 'emergency present'. In conclusion, I summarise what becomes of the relation between present and future in disruptions to the geo-historically specific distinction between emergency and everyday.

### **Section One: Emergency and the Loss of the Future**

A range of critical diagnoses of the politics and culture of the neoliberal present revolve around claims of transformations in relations with futurity. Work has stressed how faith in the future as radically new has waned or ended. Beradi (2011), for example, writes of the 'slow cancellation' of the future, in which modernist faith in the transformatory powers of the future, a faith that was always unevenly distributed and only ever available to some, has ended. In similar terms, Fisher (2014) writes of how faith in the future is interrupted by lost futures, futures that have failed to happen, that return to haunt the present. What is lost, so Fisher argues, is a sense of the future's disruptiveness, of its potential to become otherwise.



This sense of the absence of the otherness of the future is produced, in part, through ways of delegitimising other futures as unrealistic in the midst of structures of feeling marked by apathy, resignation or acquiescence to a present that harms. The best example of this is what Fisher (2009) describes as ‘capitalist realism’ – defined by him as a pervasive sense of the inevitability of current ways of arranging economy (‘There is no alternative’) and the linked loss of hope in alternatives. It involves the absence of the imagination for something different or, put differently, the absence of the possibility of eventual ruptures in the continuity of experience, of untimely events that are ‘out of joint’ and threaten or promise something new. Developing from Fisher’s account, Gilbert (2015: 33) diagnoses ‘disaffected consent’ as a neoliberal structure of feeling that involves a closing of the possibility of other futures through a combination of ‘a profound dissatisfaction with both the consequences and ideological premises of the neoliberal project’, that might generate forms of dissent, and ‘a general acquiescence with that project, a degree of deference’ together with ‘a belief that it cannot be effectively challenged’.

This diagnosis of the loss of the otherness of the future is frequently accompanied by a claim that the character of the present changes, with the emergence of what Rosa (2013) calls a ‘frenetic standstill’ (15). Cunningham (2015, no pagination, emphasis in original) summarises this claim: ‘Cut loose from historical narrative, the felt experience of the present is one of an *ongoing* state of transition, which tends to present itself less as a sense of possibility of the truly new than as a paradoxically frenzied sense of *repetition*’. Of course, we can question Cunningham’s assertion that there is a single ‘felt experience’. Nevertheless, what this work shows

is the looping of relations with futures into the tones, habits, infrastructures and practices of the present. However, even within the limited parameters of understanding contemporary Western neoliberalisms, and little is said about relations with futures in the majority world, this now familiar story of the end of the future can be nuanced. Other work has attempted to move beyond a narrative of loss, disappearance and absence by describing the emergence of new, specific relations with futures. Here the claim is that, first, otherness has been domesticated through constant anticipation and, second, otherness takes one dominant form - the catastrophic or apocalyptic.

Focusing on the nexus between (new)media and state practices of anticipation in relation to events including terrorism and climate change, Grusin (2010) tracks multiple ways in which futures are anticipated - or premediated - before they happen. Premediation does not involve a definitive prediction of what the future will be. Instead, it involves a multiplication of the possibilities surrounding a future event. Bringing multiple 'premediated' futures into the present is understood, by Grusin, as a way of attempting to eradicate the event that cannot be comprehended, the event that escapes its frame, the event that catches unaware and opens a radically new future. Instead, the present is saturated by possibilities of what could happen; possibilities that may be felt through tones of resignation, familiarity, nervousness and fatalism rather than shock or surprise. In the midst of shifts in thresholds of expectation and anticipation, actual disruptive events become as blends of the already anticipated and the unanticipated, felt through complex mixtures of shock and familiarity, excitement and boredom, disbelief and

confirmation. At the same time, other work argues that the otherness of the future has been reduced to one dominant form – the catastrophic or apocalyptic (see Calder Williams 2011; Aradau & Van Munster 2011). By reference to the end as terminus (with or without the revelatory moment of the apocoplyptic), the present become a prefiguration of the future disaster. A figure of otherness, given that catastrophe involves an overturning of what is that breaks with continuity, reducing futures to the catastrophic simultaneously generates continuities. From terrorism to trans-species epidemics, future catastrophes are governed as if present in embryonic form in the present. Neoliberal order is secured through organising attention to what Povinelli et al (2014, no pagination) name as “‘the end’ (terminal futures, finitude)’. As with premediation, catastrophic futures become part of an already tensed present. Focusing on climate change, Hulme (2009), for example, connects the repetition of catastrophic scenes of destruction to apathy, indifference, and other modes of non- or inaction that enact a sense of the inevitability of “the end”.

How, then, to understand invocations of emergency in the midst of this widespread sense of some form of transformation in the otherness of the future? We could, for example, understand emergency as a legal-political tool orientated to the continuation of the present and the erasure of the future as otherness. Consider, for example, how ‘state of emergency’ legislation exists as a now normal legal-political tool typically used for the ending of some kind of threatening future. To declare an emergency is, on the one hand, to recognise that something that threatens to bring about a different and undesired future is emerging and, on the other, to mobilise resources to ensure that a now categorised event does not come to pass. We see this

double recognition and containment of the otherness of the future in the integral role of 'state of emergency' legislation in managing dissent and revolt in colonialism. As Hussein (2003) shows, declarations of a state of emergency were a key technique for the maintenance and continuation of colonial regimes. The 'state of emergency' was a means of ending anticipated futures of disorder and change. Today, the claim that the 'state of emergency' has become the norm captures a doubled sense of the becoming routine and unsurprising of a legal-political technique and the way in which the exceptional and unexceptional fold with one another and become indistinct. The making of emergency statements and the use of emergency techniques becomes a way of attempting to ensure the perpetual continuation of present arrangements in a linear time of before, during and after.

However, whilst the extension of the 'state of emergency' may attempt to ensure that disruptive futures may never come to pass the diagnosis of the loss of the otherness of the future does not quite fit with uses of emergency. Relating to the future as an occasion for emergencies that have not yet happened introduces a sense of contingency into the present arrangement of things. The present is full of anticipated and actual disruptions, that bring with them a sense that the present is changing, and the future might be otherwise unless government happens. Of course, those future emergencies are named, categorised and rendered governable, but there is simultaneously a sense of the capacity of events as emergencies to surprise. Emergency is an occasion, perhaps, when government is brought into contact with that which is outside it and that which threatens to exceed its capacities. By which I mean that there is always the possibility that events governed as emergencies may

exceed attempts to bring them to an end. Consider all the work needed to reproduce the (always-already unequally attached to and for many long ago lost) aura and promise that the state is in control when faced by events. For example, state sovereignty is enacted through images of heroic emergency response or the presence of elected politicians in the midst of scenes of destruction, damage and loss. Exceptional scenes of emergency provide occasion for contemporary forms of mediated, diffuse, acclamation and glorification (and their opposite). We might also understand emergency exercises and inquiries as governmental techniques that stage possible future emergencies or actual past emergencies in order to repeat and sustain the fragile promise that government will be able to meet the next event.

So the time of emergency cannot quite be made to fit the narrative of the loss of the future and the contemporaneous production of a 'time without time', or an 'ever more congealed and futureless present' (Crary 2014: 35). And, whilst often collapsed in practice and analysis, the otherness of the future takes a different shape in emergency than it does in the form of the apocalyptic or catastrophic. In the remainder of the paper I diagnose the style (or styles) of relating to the future that are common across enactments of emergency as technique and term. A style is a geohistorically specific form of relation between past, present and future, examples include time as linear, as cyclical, as evental or as pre-destined. The concept downplays ontological claims about what the future is or is not in favour of attending to the manner through which 'the future' eventuates (as surprise, as continuity, as un-anticipatable, as repetition and so on). It is a means, then, of attending to the multiple, specific *forms* of relations between past, present, future

and other temporal categories without presuming that form before analysis. How, then, to characterise the style(s) of relating to the future that characterise emergency? Let's start with how emergency typically functions as one resource amongst others – catastrophe, crisis and so on – for governing the present.

## **Section Two: Emergency Times**

As a term of and for governance, emergency is typically used to name a discrete event that breaks with, interrupts, or overturns a supposedly stable everyday. For example, the use of the term 'emergency' by the emergency services of Europe and North America (such as the UK Fire and Rescue service) signifies a punctual event happening at a single or set of connected sites that is governed by being responded to within a temporary, demarcated 'scene' (or set of 'scenes'). In many respects, the services deal with what might be called 'everyday emergencies': expected occurrences that happen predictably as part of the life of distributed, dynamic infrastructures (such as fires or traffic accidents). However, even if the event is of a named and known type and even if protocols and other techniques of preparation preexist the event, in the scene of emergency ordinary life is shattered and something disassembles, to paraphrase Žižek (2014) on the event.

If seen only from the perspective of emergency as a term of and for governance, the first typical temporality of emergency is of the exception. The most significant treatment of emergency as exception is by Carl Schmitt (2006) in the context of his infamous definition of sovereignty: 'Sovereign is he who decides on

the exception' (Agamben 2005). We might interpret the declaration of a state of emergency by St Louis County in this context – as a periodic intensification of sovereign power based on a decision that an emergency is happening or will happen and a decision on the exceptional measures that can be used (by services, military troops, legislatures, etc.) to handle the actual or potential emergency. Yet in the background to some of Schmitt's (2006: 15) comments on constitutional liberalism in *Political Theology* is the idea that the event itself *provides* the exception (an exception that both pre-exists the sovereign decision and is intensified and transformed by the decision). Whilst events governed as emergencies may be felt through registers in addition to surprise and relate in complex ways to ordinary life, starting with the exception reminds us that governing through emergency involves a (contestable) claim that some kind of event has happened, is happening, or will happen.

The category of emergency does not, however, name only an exception. If we stay a little longer with uses of the term in efforts to govern events and life we find that it is inseparable from a series of other temporalities. To designate an event or situation as an emergency is to demand an urgent response: the claim is that action is necessary immediately in order to meet the event that becomes the exception. Indeed, we could say that emergency is counter to the suspended time of waiting. Folded into the term is a sense of urgency: an insistent force that compels action to forestall or end some form of harm, damage or loss (see, for example, Žižek (2006) on the 'war on terror' and 'all pervasive sense of urgency').

The sense of urgency that is part of emergency involves two interrelated temporalities in addition to exceptionality. First, it involves the presence of (or

construction of a sense of) an on-rushing future that severs the present from the past and compresses the time for decision and action. The first time, then, is the time of an omnipresent Present: there is no time except the time of *now* that requires some form of urgent action. There are resonances here with Nowotny's (1994: 50) discussion of an 'extended present', in which the future "is increasingly overshadowed by the problems which are opening up in the present". The urgency of the temporary event necessitates and calls forth similarly urgent action, in a manner that is slightly different to the extension of the horizon of planning that Nowotny diagnoses as central to the emergence of the 'extended present' and loss of 'the future'. By contrast, in emergency the time to act is compressed, and pauses in action supposedly become luxuries that threaten delay. Delay is a risk. There is no time to wait. Elaine Scarry (2011) has illustrated this by showing how 'claims of emergency' function through an affect of urgency that forestalls processes of deliberation and dissensus. Democratic procedures and habits become impediments to timely action, since 'the unspoken presumption is that either one can think or one can act, and given that it is absolutely mandatory that an action be performed, thinking must fall away.' (ibid. 7). An example would be the justification for pre-emptive decisions in the context of the US-led War on Terror. As Massumi (2005: 5) puts it in his summary and analysis of George Bush's decision making: 'A trustable decision is not made in any dangerously deliberative way. A confident decision strikes like lightning. It happens'. Emergency is characterized by a stretching or extending of the present and a temporary suspension of the transition to a future, even as a threatening future becomes present. The second temporality connected to



the sense of urgency is, then, the *interval*: the gap or break during which emergency action can still make a difference. If action is decisive and happens at the correct time, then the emergency can be brought to an end without loss, harm or damage. Like the state of exception that is the emergency, the interval is an interruption to linear time: it defines a space-time for action in-between the onset of something new and the temporary stabilization of a changed present. To govern emergencies and through emergency is to enact and act within 'intervals'.

The quality of urgency that is inseparable from emergency, and the attendant opening up of an interval of and for action, distinguishes emergency from other terms that offer resources for sensing and relating to events. For example, catastrophe differs from emergency by the absence of the faith that action can make a difference. In a catastrophe, intense destruction and damage have materialized; life has been 'overturned'. Because the catastrophic event is on the edge of what is governable, catastrophe does not function as an "attribute of management" ('catastrophe management') nor does it "name a profession" ('catastrophe planners') (compare with 'emergency management' and 'emergency planners') (Aradau and van Munster 2011: 4). Rather, catastrophe induces a sense of limits; the limits of existing ways of governing and the limits of knowledge (ibid. 5). By comparison, emergencies involve a demand for immediate, urgent action without delay. As Anderson (2016) puts it, in an emergency there is no time, except the time of now, a time that is running out. Emergencies are, in this sense, activating: they are events or situations where action can still make a difference.

We could thus say that inseparable from the category of emergency is a species of hope: though the outcome of an event or situation is uncertain, correct action may make a difference, and that which is threatened might be averted. In a situation of emergency, the future is alterable, even as it looms over a suspended present. A world of emergencies is far away from a world of pre-ordained fate in which the future is already given. In an emergency, some kind of harm, damage or loss to something that must be protected is in the midst of emerging, as is a new spatial and temporal arrangement that will form through and after the emergency. But hope remains. For what is also emerging in an emergency, or at least is demanded in situations where a responsibility to protect and an imperative to act remains, is action taken to stop, halt or otherwise affect the emergency. Emergency and the response to an emergency emerge together, both becoming with the tangle of scenes, trajectories, objects and other things that compose people's everyday lives.

### **Section Three: Emergency Hope**

Let's return, then, to the declarations of emergency that I started with and trace how they enact and/or disrupt the geohistorically specific distinction between emergency and the everyday that the term is founded upon and reproduces. The sovereign declaration of a 'state of emergency' by St Louis County interrupts the smooth, continuous progression from past to present to future. It names an anticipated and/or actual exception to the normal state of affairs. There is a presumption that harm or damage may emerge and that exceptional action in a time limited interval is needed now in order to end the exception. Nevertheless, it

incorporates the promise of return in the future to a pre-emergency normality. Other ways of managing emergencies without a formal declaration of emergency incorporate a similar mix of interrupted, linear and cyclical temporalities. Consider, for example, the apparatus of 'UK Civil Contingencies' (Anderson & Adey 2012). Governing any actual event involves moving through linear 'stages' of 'response' and 'recovery', with the promise being that appropriate action will result in a return to normality. At the same time, government involves perpetual cycles of response-recovery and preparation, with past preparatory activities (and the techniques developed there) folding into future response-recovery actions.

The sovereign declaration of a state of emergency to govern protest was met by intense, activist contestation about what counted as an emergency. Patrisse Culler's statement that I began the paper with is one attempt to mobilise action by disrupting what counts as an emergency whilst still using the language of emergency to generate a sense of urgency and so mobilise action. Echoing Culler's statement that life is lived in emergency conditions for too many Black people in the U.S.A., on social media and in public protests activists redescribed what had become ordinary conditions that harm and damage as the real emergency (complementing activists' ways of rendering visible and generating political feeling about the harassment and killing of Black men and women in scenes of police violence). For example, a twitter hashtag '#whichemergency' was used more than 10,000 times on the day of St Louis County's declaration of a 'state of emergency'. People redescribed various distributed urban systems (health care, the penal state, work and welfare policy) as conditions that generated emergencies that damaged Black lives.

In addition to dispersed, frequently repeated scenes of police violence, what was politicised under the name of emergency were various spatially and temporally extended processes of 'slow death' that, in Berlant's (2007: 754) terms, involve 'the physical wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence'. An example: "#Whicheemergency the one where schools are underfunded, our neighborhoods are over policed, and our access to resources are slim to none".

In the act of politicising processes of slow death, the temporality of emergency coexisted and folded with the temporality of the endemic. Typically, the endemic is counter to the exceptionality, urgency, and interval that in the previous section I argued characterises uses of emergency to govern. The endemic is what endures and is more or less adjusted to without scenes of impact (Berlant 2007). Renaming the endemic as a series of emergencies interrupts this dispersal of impact. It disrupts the line between the endemic and the evental, through a call that response is necessary as damages and harms are in the midst of happening (or in this case a redistribution of state response and concern from the policing of street protest to addressing endemic conditions of harm and damage). There is also, at the same time, a sense that these emergencies are not punctual events and there is not a stable normality, a non-emergency time, to be returned to. In this respect, activist contestation of what counted as emergency politicised conditions that mix different temporalities (and are currently being redescribed through terms such as expulsion (Sassen 2014) and abandonment/endurance (Povinelli 2011), as well as slow death (Berlant 2007)).

This becoming indistinct of the endemic and evental, or the structural and the impactful, produces a specific type of 'emergency present'. Forms of harm and damage repeat in a non-evental time made through institutional repetitions that gather to form what Povinelli (2011) terms 'conditions of endurance'. The present is made through accumulations that become the seemingly stable background to be lived with; the effects of which are made present in harmful outcomes. There is no non-emergency normality to return to, nor are emergencies interruptions or eruptions that emerge unexpectedly and take by surprise. Divisions between event and non-event have collapsed. One mechanism for producing this indistinction is the folding of a sense of emergency into the mode of operation of the very systems and infrastructures that, for some, once produced a sense of stability (and thus shifting concern and the demand for action from conditions to individual symptoms). Poppendieck (1999) tracks how in the USA the systems that once promised security have become organised around temporary, time limited, conditional emergency provision. At the same time, she shows how marginalised lives are lived in movements between those systems – in passages between emergency healthcare, emergency shelter and emergency food provision, and in the gaps between them. Whilst the terms are a little different, this extended 'emergency present' is anticipated in a range of new descriptors for understanding the temporality of the present. Consider how the term precarity offers a way of diagnosing a shared but always varying and often inchoate sense of "predictable unpredictability" (Southwood 2011) across diverse, differentiating circumstances and scenes. What is understood to characterise precarity is perpetual background

instability where what is ever present is the possibility of some kind of emergent disruption, in part because the present is constituted by the afterlives of previous actual and almost-not-quite disruptions (Lorey 2015).

Precarity is but one example of other emergency times that follow from collapsing the distinction between the times of emergency and the times of the everyday (see also Taussig (1992) on the 'nervous system'). One example of where lines have blurred is in the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of a 'permanent state of emergency' in which states of war and peace blur with one another. The claim is that a temporary measure or paradigm—the state of emergency—is now a normal part of contemporary liberal-democratic states, something revealed and intensified in the context of the 'war on terror' (Armitage 2002; Agamben 2002). We might think of the regularity in which 'state of emergency' legislation has been used to police protests, including Black Lives Matter protests, as an example of this blurring. Whilst a formal state of emergency has not been in force for the entire period, the policing of protest at the level of states has involved the production of something like an atmosphere in which a declaration of emergency is always possible. However, this blurring of peace and war is not new and cannot be reduced to a post 9/11 phenomenon. As well as the becoming ordinary of emergency legislation in colonialism (Hussain 2003), Simone Browne (2015) shows how the contemporary surveillance practices that underpin and animate the normalisation of emergency emerge from long trajectories of anti-Black racism in the United States.

But of course states are constantly drawing the line between emergencies and a normal state of affairs in ways that reaffirm the equation between emergencies and

exceptional time and attempts to hide forms of endemic harm and damage. The declaration of the state of emergency by St Louis County in response to the governing of protest as disruption is one such occasion. But even there the lines between emergency time and other times blur. The declaration is an operational technique that mobilises exceptional police response. However, that response has been rehearsed in exercises that, in part, attempt to entrain particular habits of response to protest governed as riot. Parts of apparatuses of distributed preparation for events, exercises function by bringing future emergencies into the here and now through techniques that stage and perform events (Anderson 2010). They reproduce and enact the hope that through preparation in the rehearsed present of an 'as if' emergency, action in the actual emergency can meet the event, bring it to an end and return life to a non-emergency everyday. Exercises stage and perform the promise of the emergency state: that a non-emergency normality exists and can be protected.

Back to the contestation of what counted as an emergency by Black Lives Matter activists. We can understand it, first, as an expression of the inseparability of emergency times and everyday times and, as a consequence, the breaking down of the term emergency. The distinction between everyday and emergency has only ever been available to some and is produced at the cost of making life into a perpetual emergency for others. But, second, it also expresses a political use of emergency as a pragmatic-contextual intervention in the present that aims precisely to disrupt what has already become normal. What is claimed is not that time is insecure or unstable, but that processes of harm, damage, suffering and loss have become endemic and everyday. Naming the everyday as an emergency is, in part, a bearing witness to

and making present how otherwise invisible, silent, violences result in Black lives not mattering. It is because a distinction between emergency and the everyday is refused and that it is not only the state that is called upon to adjudicate the claim of emergency, that the use of a technique and vocabulary of emergency interrupts rather than reproduces existing effects and configurations of power (compare with Brown's (1995) argument regarding the contradictory effects of oppositional political projects using the tools of the state to seek redress for forms of injury).

To claim a situation as an emergency is in the case of the Black Lives Matter protests and potentially other cases an affirmation and an act of hope. What is affirmed is that whatever is threatened in the emergency matters and that urgent action is necessary in order to save, protect or enable that life. Bearing witness to the ordinary as an emergency that has never been responded to as such becomes one way (amongst a number) of affirming that Black lives matter. It places hope in emergency as a term that demands and galvanises action, despite the extent to which emergency as technique has been central to enactments of state power. And it keeps alive the hope that action can make a difference and the situation is transformable (as well as the hope that other definitions of the situation are possible). The hope in emergency as tool of mobilisation folds another sense of the future into emergency, or at least it does if we stay a while with the event of declaration. Writing on hope, Ernst Bloch (1988) describes it around the temporality of the 'not-yet'. Pivotal in his attempt to shift the orientation of knowledge from 'what has become' to an open world, the term 'not yet' has a doubled meaning in Bloch's work (as well as being internally divided into the 'not-yet conscious' and the 'not-yet become'). Something



is 'not-yet' in the sense that it is 'still not' and may never happen. And something is 'not-yet' in that undetermined futures become with a present full of hopeful moments: 'turning points' (Bloch 1998: 23) that constitute a crack in linear continuity. This means that hope is without guarantees, its ground is not-yet:

'[h]ope must be unconditionally disappointable ... because it is open in a forward direction, in a future-orientated direction; it does not address itself to that which already exists. For this reason, hope – while actually in a state of suspension – is committed to change rather than repetition, and what is more, incorporates the element of chance, without which there can be nothing new'.

(Bloch 1998: 341)

Staying awhile with the hopeful event and structure of the call to recognise *this* as the emergency allows us to think again about the 'emergency present'. Declaring that conditions are emergencies opens up the possibility of a future otherwise in which slow and fast anti-Black violences are interrupted and end. It presupposes and produces the possibility of the future becoming differently. But, at the same time, it changes the character of the now emergency present. Declaring that un- or barely- bearable conditions are emergencies and that response is necessary because Black lives matter and time remains produces the present as opening. To paraphrase Taussig (2002), similarly concerned with the indistinctions between emergency and normality, it is an act that produces a 'spark of hope' ... or hopes to.

## **Conclusion: Being in Emergency**

Declaring that life is an emergency is one way a spark of hope may be generated from within the 'crisis ordinariness' (Berlant 2011) of anti-Black violence. There is much more to be said about how such sparks of hope become with the other political affects that surface as Black Lives Matter connects intense scenes of police brutality to other quieter but no less devastating forms of violence. Staying awhile with the hopeful moment of taking exception to harmful conditions that have become normal allows us to think again about the styles of relating to the future that are now folded into emergency. It also reminds us that a different politics of emergency might emerge if we start from the use of emergency by non-state and non-sovereign actors to disrupt systems of rule. Critical work has taken exception to emergency (and in particular the equation between emergency and the legal-political technique of the state of exception) on the basis, partly, that invocations of emergency produce the effect of continuation, of closing futures. Emergency statements or claims or measures, on this account, can be understood as another set of mechanisms for ensuring disruptive futures, futures that might become otherwise than the present, do not come to pass and existing arrangements repeat and endure (albeit in the context of their disruption and possible dissolution). Not least, because invocations of emergency with its attendant sense of urgency are taken to foreclose the thinking-feeling habits and practices (such as deliberation and dissensus) supposedly necessary for the opening of futures and initiating something different. This is, though, to understand uses of emergency prospectively – from the promise

of ending an unwanted future that it is inseparable from – and retrospectively – from the position of a future that remains the same as the present was before the emergency. In this paper, I have tried to stay awhile with what becomes of the present as emergency statements, claims and acts are made and how iterations of emergency enact a particular style – or form – of relation between past, present and future. What characterises emergency is a simultaneous sense of a time outside of what is recognised and felt as everyday time (exceptionality), of a hopeful time for action, where the materialisation of damage is temporarily suspended (omnipresent present and interval), and the time of a present becoming.

Emergency involves, then, a specific relation with ‘the future’ that cannot be smoothly incorporated into narratives of the loss of the otherness of the future. The use of the vocabulary of emergency and state of emergency in some Black Lives Matter actions enacts this emergency temporality, but it also brings its implicit separation between emergency and the everyday into question by connecting racialised police violence to material conditions that unevenly distribute value and vulnerability as race intersects with gender, class and sexuality. Compare this with the formal declaration of a state of emergency by St Louis County. Governing protest through this legal-political measure depends on a spatial and temporal demarcation of both the possible emergency and of the state of emergency. By contrast, the declaration that life is a state of emergency attempts to make dispersed conditions that are inseparable from ordinary life into an Event. Food poverty, unemployment, mortality rates and so on constitute the measured traces of a state of emergency that is normally without a single scene of visible impact. But it does so without

demarcating the site of emergency in separation from the everyday, precisely because the emergency is the everyday and the everyday is an emergency, albeit one that goes unrecognized by many and so requires naming. Declaring ongoing conditions to be emergencies is a hopeful act in that it aims to interrupt those conditions by making what has become ordinary into an exception. The declaration that life is an emergency is an attempt to halt conditions, to step out of the continuous time of the linear reproduction of the emergency/everyday. Because it is propelled by a sense of necessity rather than of the 'right time', the declaration is not the time of *cairos* – 'the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity and life is fulfilled in the moment' (Agamben 1993: 111). Life is not 'fulfilled' in the moment of Patrisse Cullors declaring that 'this is a state of emergency'; far from it. The hoped for future is not-yet.

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<sup>i</sup> Interview by Jamil Smith, a senior editor at the New Republic with Patrisse Cullors in New Republic <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/122334/blacklivesmatter-co-founder-we-are-state-emergency>

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<sup>ii</sup> Executive Order, St Louis County. Available at:

<http://www.stlouisco.com/Portals/8/Executive%20Order%20Criminal%20Unrest.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> St Louis County Executive Office Steve Stenger quoted in 'St louis County Executive Issues State of Emergency'. Available at: <http://www.stlouisco.com/Community/News/Article/1217/St-Louis-County-Executive-Issues-State-of-Emergency>